

April 26, 2015

To: History/Social Science Committee

Re: Need for Latino history included in the draft Framework for History/Social Sciences

I am a Lecturer in the Ethnic Studies Department at California State University, Sacramento. I have taught classes introducing Ethnic Studies and Chicano/Latino Studies for over 20 years. With over 40 years as a Latino civil rights activist, I have tried to integrate my experiences into a curriculum that studies cultures, languages and historical/contemporary issues relating to Chicanos/as-Latinos/as. Our students are asked to critically examine the contributions made by these groups to American society and to become intellectually involved in eliminating racial, ethnic and gender based problems. The vast majority of students taking these classes are Latino/a (80-90%). They are astonished and energized to learn about their culture and their direct relationship to current political debates that are rooted in their ethnic history. It has become evident to me, in all my classes and with all my students that a cultural examination of ethnic history creates/contributes to healthy identity formation and a robust and deep desire for civic engagement.

The following comments and suggestions are meant to support an expanded presentation of Mexican/Chicano history in the U.S. However, these notes are not meant to stop at the border. Instead I have tried to add concepts that place U.S. history within the wider lens of the Americas. The observations are both general and specific and hopefully contribute to draft proposals regarding U.S. History 11th grade course work. (pages 340-351).

1. Immigration reform should be examined as a contemporary issue with specific references to past law and policy connected to Latinos. There are three ideas that warrant review. First, that U.S foreign policy and economic clout has led to the displacement of working people from various parts of the Americas to this country. Generally during times of economic depression this has led to negative stereotypes and hostility toward immigrants. Examples of laws and policies would include: Repatriation campaigns, Operation Wetback, Operation Gatekeeper, HR 4437 and California Proposition 187. Two, in the aftermath of recent anti-immigrant proposals, Latinos organized some of the largest civil rights demonstrations in U.S. history. Three, this movement created new and young leaders. They are oftentimes referred to as DREAMERS because many came to this country when they were infants. The draft proposal should include a Sidebar interview with a DREAMER that summarizes their views on political engagement and ties it to U.S. history.
2. Many of my students are concerned with and have questions regarding their ethnic identity. It is worthwhile to define these forms of identity within a historical context. As an example in the aftermath of WW II many veterans rejected a purely assimilationist perspective regarding their identity. They were confounded by racial segregation and began to assert a Mexican-American identity. That is, they began to see themselves as ethnically Mexican but at the same time politically protected by the constitution and the pluralistic ideals of American democracy. This section should review terms like Hispanic and Chicano. But it should also present difficult dialogs that

are rooted in history regarding Assimilation, Language denial, being an ethnic traitor and/or acting “white.”

3. There is insufficient attention given to the contributions of Latinas and the role of gender dynamics in the Americas and U.S. history. The draft proposal should at a minimum present Sidebars that would help younger women visualize themselves in history. Examples might include: Emma Tenayuca-Labor Organizer, Lolita Lebron -Puerto Rican activist, Elizabeth Martinez-Author and Civil Rights activist. I understand there is limited space but I think it would be beneficial to work into the draft a series of difficult dialogs among young women and men. There should be questions and discussion regarding the history of male supremacy and its relationship to culture and identity.

4. The rest of the Americas gave rise to significant racial and cultural mixing. The U.S. not so much. Until now. Students have expressed deep interest on the history of the music they listen to, the foods that they eat, the spiritual perspectives that shape their lives. Providing historical context for racial mixing and cultural syncretism would be a new and interesting view on how the U.S. saw itself and where it is now moving. As an example, Sidebars could show the history of musical instruments in the Americas and how they shape/contribute to contemporary music in the U.S.

These are some general observations and suggestions. I would be happy to contribute more specifics with your working group or with a legislative committee. I think these ideas are important and can help young people better see the world and contribute to the future of California. My mailing address is 3932 Downey Way Sacramento 95817. Please feel free to contact me on campus. My email address is sac86880@csus.edu. I can be reached by phone at (916) 278-6645 or my cell at (916) 420-2469.

Sincerely,

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